

## *Conversations on Europe 2017-18*

**March 14**

May 1968: Legacies of Protest in France

**March 27**

Elections in Italy: A Next Wave for Populists? (In Italian)

All conversations are held on Wednesdays from noon to 1:30 P.M. in 4217 Posvar Hall. Conversations are free and open to the public. You may join us in-person or remotely.

## **Pitt Researchers Support UN Efforts to Combat Global Gender Inequality**

by Müge Finkel and Melanie Hughes

The agenda of the United Nations, encapsulated by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Development Agenda, have challenged policymakers at all levels to refocus their energies on the most urgent and widely shared global problems and developmental gaps: poverty, hunger, climate change, and social justice. Efforts to combat gender inequalities feature prominently throughout the SDGs, not only as a stand-alone goal to “achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls,” but also appearing in 13 out of the other 16 goals. Of the 232 indicators that have been selected to assess progress towards these goals nearly one quarter, 53 indicators in total, have a gender component to them. A research team at the University of Pittsburgh, led by Assistant Professor of International Development, Müge Finkel and Associate Professor of Sociology, Melanie Hughes, and supported by the ESC’s Jean Monnet European Union Center of Excellence Faculty Research Grant, has been working to support the United Nation’s work to close gender gaps around the world.

Our Gender Equality in Public Administration (GEPA) Working Group – a multidisciplinary graduate student research group housed at the Ford Institute for Human Security in GSPIA – has been collaborating with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the UN agency trusted with the monitoring and implementation of the SDGs, particularly SDG 16. SDG 16 aspires to “peace, justice and strong institutions” through promotion of “responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.” GEPA’s work supporting SDG 16 has focused on public administration or civil service – the employees that work in the executive branch of the central, state, and local government, and in public departments, agencies, commissions, and boards. Since fall 2015, our team has logged thousands of hours to help UNDP map country-level tracking of existing data; to collect, visualize and analyze data on women’s participation in public administration; and to contribute to national policy recommendations for improved data tracking.

Our efforts were guided by an important truth—in many countries, public administration is the largest and sometimes the only acceptable employer of women. So, if we were to speak about gender equalities in employment, the public sector would be the first and perhaps most influential employer we would have to face. Furthermore, at least on paper, most governments and their agencies have committed themselves through their policies to gender equality in the societies they serve and represent. Ironically, a lack of women’s leadership would prevent half the population from exerting proportionate influence over the policy and administrative decisions towards equality. This focus on public administration becomes even more consequential considering its role as the employer of large numbers of government workers, in addition to its core function of public policymaking.

Our research demonstrates that complex questions involving gender parity in public administration are vastly underexplored. Data on women in decision-making is available only in 43 countries, of which 25 fall below the

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*This newsletter has been funded with assistance from the European Union and the International and Foreign Language Education (IFLE) office of the U.S. Department of Education. The contents are the sole responsibility of the ESC and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the EU or the U.S. Government.*

globally-agreed upon target of 30 percent women in these positions, a modest goal in comparison to the more ambitious SDG commitment of 50-50 representation and access to decision-making levels. But countries define and measure “decision-making positions” in different ways, making it difficult to clearly identify ‘glass ceilings’ that prevent women from reaching higher levels of decision-making. Additionally, the sectors and agencies included as part of public administration differ from country to country, making it hard to study where ‘glass walls’ might exist. All of these factors obscure how systems for recruitment, promotion, and grading in different countries might create ‘leaky pipes’ that inhibit women’s access to leadership posts. As we have come to understand the gaps in existing data and knowledge, we realized we needed to know a lot more about each of these factors before we could begin to understand and assess gender equality in public administrations cross-nationally.



*Participants of the Pittsburgh-based gender equality workshop, GIRL, pose for a group photo.*

In an effort to start unpacking these unknowns, last summer we helped to organize and participate in a workshop at the UNDP Oslo Governance Center in Norway—a country well known for gender equality in politics, the private sector, and public policymaking. Our participation in the workshop was made possible with the Jean Monnet European Union Center of Excellence Faculty Research Grant. The workshop, titled “Data to Policymaking on Diversity in Public Institutions,” was planned as a roundtable discussion bringing together a small group of academics, policymakers and development practitioners to discuss how best to locate and collect sex-disaggregated data, exchange ideas and experiences and forge future collaborations.

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The workshop gave us a chance to discuss our initial strides and hiccups with locating, distilling and analyzing sex-disaggregated public administration data with our Norwegian colleagues and policy experts. At this workshop we confirmed good data drives better informed policies and delivers desirable outcomes for all: case in point, the carefully crafted cross-national data sets that are driving and sustaining progress in women's political participation. A similarly data-driven quest seems to be taking place in the private sector, assessing missed opportunities when women are not in leadership positions in their companies. The workshop confirmed that a similar exploration in public administration is missing, and that our less-than-perfect data set is what we need to take the discussion to the next step.



*Drs. Müge Finkel and Melanie Hughes appear in front of the UN.*

Our workshop took place on the summer solstice, a day with more than 19 hours of daylight in Norway, a coincidence we took as a positive sign. With the introductions we made and the connections we solidified, we launched and convened the first workshop of Gender Inequality Research Lab, GIRL, at Pitt in November 2017. We modeled GIRL after our Oslo experience and planned for an intense exchange of experiences on how data collection informs policymaking. This time, the experiences and expertise of academics and practitioners from South Africa, Colombia, Denmark, Tanzania, and Uganda came to Pittsburgh. At the end of an intense three days of non-stop work, our colleagues and new partners in this endeavor, complimented our energy and the commitment of GEPA.

With each workshop, first in Oslo and now in Pittsburgh, the ground shifted, a bit more dirt was uncovered, a few more questions were better asked. GIRL has already become part of an important conversation that promises to facilitate diverse policymaking and drive more gender equal outcomes globally. We have accomplished step one of building and sustaining collaboration between development partners, public institutions, and academia to advance the diversity agenda in public institutions with the support we received from the European Studies Center. Step two requires more research time and more resources to build a solid database made up of quality cross-national indicators. As we prepare to launch step two with 3 pilot countries, we keep reminding ourselves Rome was not built in one day. Plenty of times we wish it were otherwise because in the case of tackling gender inequalities, all of our efforts cannot help but feel a day too late.

*Dr. Melanie M. Hughes is Associate Professor of Sociology and Co-Director of the Gender Inequality Research Lab (GIRL) at the University of Pittsburgh and is one of the world's foremost experts on the political representation of women worldwide. She co-leads the Ford Institute for Human Security research group on Gender Equality in Public Administration (GEPA), a collaborative research effort with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). She is also working on a research monograph on the political dominance of men from majority racial, ethnic, and religious groups.*

*Dr. Müge Kökten Finkel is Assistant Professor of International Development at the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs (GSPIA) at the University of Pittsburgh. She is the faculty co-lead of the Ford Institute for Human Security research group on Gender Equality in Public Administration (GEPA). In support of her GEPA research, the Global Studies Center at the University of Pittsburgh has named Dr. Finkel the Global Studies Faculty Fellow for the academic year 2017-2018. Dr. Finkel has a PhD in Political Science from the University of Virginia; an MA from the International University of Japan; and a BA from Bogazici University in Turkey.*